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ABSTRACT

C-SPAN (Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network) can be used for communications oriented research. A research project on reactions in the United States to the Chinese pro-democracy movement shows the use of C-SPAN as a representative forum. Primary funding for the project was obtained through grants from C-SPAN. Twenty-one C-SPAN programs since 1987 (relevant to the Chinese pro-democracy movement and encompassing a variety of program types) were viewed and analyzed for high context/low context messaging. Chinese speakers typically use high context channels of communication that tend to be less direct and heavily reliant on nonverbal messages, while American speakers typically use low context channels that tend to be more direct and based on literal verbal statements. (Cross-cultural misunderstanding can easily occur when interactants use different channels on this continuum.) Findings from this analysis can benefit student understanding in a variety of courses in the communication arts curriculum including mass media, persuasion, and interpersonal communication. (Two addresses are attached for those interested in obtaining more information.) (SR)

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Jim Schnell

USING C-SPAN AS A RESEARCH TOOL TO ANALYZE CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONS

In recent years the academic community has recognized C-SPAN (Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network) as a valuable teaching tool in the classroom. This article will describe how C-SPAN can be used for communications oriented research. Such application is exemplified in this report using my research entitled "Reaction in the U.S. to the Chinese Pro-democracy Movement." Discussion of this undertaking emphasizes methodology, thus enabling the reader to realize possible applications in his/her own research area.

Within my particular research area, cross-cultural issues related to U.S.-China relations, I have focused on reaction in the U.S. to the Chinese pro-democracy movement using C-SPAN as a representative forum for discussion on the issue. My background is appropriate for engaging in this type of research. I have visited China three times (twice as a visiting professor), published a number of scholarly articles on U.S.-China relations, and am a Major in the U.S. Air Force Intelligence Agency/Reserves (Pacific Command). C-SPAN is a representative forum because it does not have a political agenda it is promoting. I will present this project in sequential steps.

1) Primary funding for this research was obtained through a C-SPAN faculty development grant ($500.) and an additional $350. was granted by C-SPAN in recognition of my participation at a C-SPAN seminar for professors. Funding

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can obviously be acquired through a variety of means within the faculty member's institution.

2) I then contacted the Public Affairs Video Archives at Purdue University. Tapes of all C-SPAN programs since 1987 are indexed at the Archives and are available from the organization. I requested from them a selected listing of programs dealing with reforms in China. They prepared and sent me an annotated list of 82 programs (ranging in time from 30 minutes to ten hours and ranging in cost from $30. to $275.).

3) Twenty one programs were selected based on their relevance to the Chinese pro-democracy movement. Types of programs included forums, news conferences, speeches to the National Press Club, roundtables, speeches, House Committees, call-in shows, House Highlights, Congressional News Conferences, Senate Committees, and book reviews.

4) While viewing the tapes I prepared notes and, based on observed consistencies, decided to interpret the tapes through analysis of the high context/low context messaging. That is, the high context channels of communication used by Chinese speakers conflicted with low context channels of communication used by Americans. This exemplifies a standard cross-cultural communication dynamic. Analysis focused on responses by President Bush, U.S. political representatives, Chinese students studying in the U.S., Chinese diplomatic representatives, and the American public.

Chinese speakers typically use high context channels of

communication that tend to be less direct and heavily reliant on nonverbal messages. American speakers typically use low context channels of communication that tend to be more direct and based on literal verbal statements. Cross-cultural misunderstanding can easily occur when interactants are using different channels on the high context-low context continuum.

5) This analysis is appropriate for publication in academic journals (in written form). More unique, however, it is appropriate for video presentation at professional conferences (using excerpts from the C-SPAN programs). This obviously provides illuminating context for the findings. One can argue that use of such tape excerpts are more valuable than traditional footnoting in written formats.

6) These videotape presentations, comprised of C-SPAN excerpts and my interpretive narration, can then be used as innovative teaching resources. Feedback from colleagues at professional conferences can be useful in sharpening the focus of the presentations. Findings from this analysis can benefit student understanding in a variety of courses in the communication arts curriculum including Mass Media, Persuasion, Cross-Cultural Communication, Rhetorical Communication Theory, Interpersonal Communication, and Public Speaking.

There are many who argue scholarly research is done at the expense of time that can be put towards effective teaching. Use of C-SPAN in the aforementioned manner allows the faculty member to competently meet both objectives.

Those interested in obtaining more information about C-SPAN and the Public Affairs Video Archives may contact the following:

C-SPAN
400 North Capitol Street N.W.
Suite 650
Washington, D.C. 20001
800-523-7586

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